

*Final*

PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

Director Stansfield Turner

The Los Angeles Press Club  
Los Angeles, California  
Friday, March 30, 1979

DIRECTOR STANSFIELD TURNER: Good morning. I'm sorry that I just couldn't respond to Ben Kelley's request a couple of weeks ago that we get together and testify this morning. I know newsmen and women always favor an early morning event. I appreciate your accommodating my difficult schedule today, having to get on to other cities and getting together here this morning, because I'd like to talk with you briefly before the question period about the fact that there are some very profound changes taking place today in the intelligence organization of our country. They are far-reaching; they're fundamental, and I believe they're also beneficial.

These changes come from the stimulus of three principal external factors, external to the intelligence community. The first is the changing perception the United States has of its role in the world. Second are the burgeoning capabilities for collecting intelligence by sophisticated technical techniques which are becoming available to us.

The third, directly related to you, is the increasing interest and concern of the American public in intelligence activities stemming from the investigation of the '74 and '76 period.

Let me briefly describe how each of these factors are changing the process of intelligence for our country.

First with respect to our perspective on the world scene, I think the United States is in a period of transition in its attitude toward world affairs, a transition from a very activist, interventionist mode to one in which there is a deeper recognition of the limits on our ability to influence

-2-

events in other countries. I am by no means suggesting that we are entering into a period of isolationism and withdrawal from the world scene. In fact, I'm encouraged in feeling that we are gradually coming out of our post Vietnam aversion to any consideration of active intervention overseas, and we are developing a more realistic and balanced view on our responsibilities to the world; responsibilities which we simply cannot shirk.

Yet the circumstances today are such that we must gauge more carefully than ever before, I believe, just what our role can be and should be in international affairs. Look, for instance, today at the difficulty we have in simply deciding whom we are for and whom we are against in any particular international issue. Traditionally, we've always been for the people the Russians have been against, right? Look back just at 1978 and see what the application of that criteria might have done to us.

At this time last year, there was a war between Ethiopia and Somalia. The Russians were for the Ethiopians against the Somalis. The Somalis: should we have been for them? The country was led by a Marxist dictator who was the aggressor in this war. Tough choice. Last year ended with another war going on in Cambodia. The Russians were for the Vietnamese, who were attacking Cambodia and against the Cambodians. Should we have been for Pol Pot, the leader of Cambodia, perhaps the most repressive national leader on the face of the globe since Adolf Hitler? Tough choice for us.

Besides this, aren't we coming to recognize that it may not really be necessary for us, the United States, to take sides in every international issue. It's not nearly so clear today that the consequences of some other nations succumbing to communist influence is going to be as irreversible as we often thought it was in the past. We've had the examples of Egypt, Indonesia, Sudan, Somalia, all of which were at one time subject to considerable influence from the Soviet Union and who have just come back and re-emerged into independence.

So today there is a legitimate question in our body politic as to whether it is necessary for us to come to the support of every struggling nation under pressure from the communist bloc. But today even if we decide that some other nation does deserve our support, there are problems in providing that support that simply did not exist a decade or two ago.

One of those, as you will well understand, is the revolution in international communications. Today, any international action that we take is instantly replayed around the globe. It's instantly subjected to analysis, to criticism or

-3-

approbation. And that international public judgment, it seems to me, does inhibit the actions, the attitudes of even major powers like ourselves and the Soviet Union, even though the countries voicing their approbation or criticism of our actions are generally second or third level powers.

There are also other difficulties today that we didn't face a few years ago if we attempt to sway other countries through diplomacy or international organizations. In the past, most of the free countries of the world took their cue from us in matters of international debate. Today, in a forum like the United Nations, there's one vote for one country, and each of those little countries exercises that vote with the greatest sense of independence of the major powers. And in fact, we and the Soviets often find ourselves together on the minority side of a vote in organizations like that.

If today, out of frustration with diplomacy, we turn to intervention overseas militarily, we also have problems that did not exist just a few years ago. Recollecting our problems in Vietnam, we can recognize that with the pendulum of offense and defense in military weaponry tends toward the defense, as I believe it does today, even a minor military power can cause considerable difficulties for a major military nation.

What all this adds up to is not that we are not important on the world scene, but that the leverage of our influence, considerable as it is, must be exercised today more subtly than in the past if it's going to be effective. We must be more concerned with long-term influences, not just with putting our finger in the dike. We must be able to anticipate rather than just react to events. And we in the intelligence world must be able to understand and interpret the underlying forces, forces which can be influenced by our nation over considerable periods of time. In short, this has vastly expanded the scope of our endeavors in intelligence.

For the first thirty years of our existence, our primary concern was to keep track of Soviet military development. Today, the threat to our national well-being come not only from actions by the Soviet Union, nor are they restricted purely to military concerns. The subject matter with which we in intelligence must be intimately familiar has broadened to include politics, economics, narcotics, international terrorism, energy predictions, food, population, the psychiatry and health of foreign leaders, and many, many other areas. There is hardly an academic discipline, there is hardly a geographic area of the world with which we must not be familiar in order to keep our national leaders advised so they can make the best foreign policy decision for our country.

Hence, this is a demanding time for the intelligence

-4-

organizations of our country, a time of fundamental change with this vast expansion of the scope of our work.

The second factor driving change, as I mentioned, was the technological revolution; in effect, how we collect our intelligence information. Basically, as you well know, there are three generic types of intelligence collection. There are photographs from satellites, from airplanes. There are signals that are intercepted from military equipment, from communications systems. And there is human intelligence, the traditional spy. The first two of these, photographs and signals, we classify as technical intelligence. And here the capabilities really are burgeoning in this area, thanks to the great sophistication of American industry.

Interestingly though, rather than denigrating the value or the need for the traditional human intelligence agent, the growing technical capabilities, in fact, increase our reliance on and the importance of the human intelligence factor. Very broadly speaking, technically collected intelligence tells you something that happened sometime in the past. It often raises more questions than it answers. People want to know why did it happen and what is going to happen next. Uncovering the concerns of other nations, the pressures that influence their decisions and their intentions is the forte of the human intelligence agent. And it is indispensable that we have this input if we're going to hope to be able to predict those future trends, as I was suggesting a minute ago.

The challenge that we face then today is not to emphasize technical or human, photographic or signal: it's to be sure we play them all together as a team, so they complement each other, so we can orchestrate them, and so we can do the end task for our country in the least expensive and the least risky way.

What questions a photograph cannot answer we may try to solve by intercepting a signal, or by dispatching a human intelligence agent. For instance, if you have gained a hint from a conversation on somebody's plans, you may then go and try to photograph something that will confirm that that kind of an action is taking place. Or if you have a photograph of a new industrial installation and you wonder if perhaps it's there to produce nuclear weapons, you may then very specifically target a human intelligence agent to probe into that installation and see if you can get a clue as to its purpose.

All that may sound very logical and very simple to you, but our technical capabilities are growing so rapidly and are basically so new to us that this process of building a coordinated teamwork effort in collecting intelligence is requiring us to do business in different ways. Intelligence in our country

is a large bureaucracy spread over a number of government departments and agencies, each of which has its own priorities and concerns. It is a fundamental restructuring that is required to be sure the concerns are brought together and meshed in a way that is best for our overall country.

The Director of Central Intelligence, since the founding of that body in 1947 by the National Security Act, has been authorized to coordinate all of these national intelligence activities. Unfortunately, the authorities to be effective in doing that have not existed until just recently. Just a little over a year ago, President Carter strengthened my authority over the various elements of intelligence in our country, particularly over their budgets and over the directing of their collecting activities. It's still too early to say this is working perfectly. It's in an evolving state right now. It's coming along well. But it is a fundamental difference in the management of intelligence in our country.

The third factor driving change was a greater interest of the American public in what we are doing. The intelligence investigations of recent years certainly brought American intelligence activities into greater public attention than ever before in the history of the world of any major intelligence organization been explored. The impact of all this added visibility has been very substantial on us. In fact, I would say it has been traumatic within the intelligence community itself. The right kind of visibility can and has been beneficial, both to us and to you. By the "right kind," I mean the public's access to information which permits it to understand, at least generically, what we are doing and why, and which confirms that we are not doing things that we shouldn't do, and which confirms that the controls which have been established over intelligence in recent years are, in fact, working as they should. And to achieve this greater understanding, this greater sense of support we need from the American public, we are trying to be more open today, with you in the media, with the public in general. We are passing more of what we do directly to you, through the regular publication of unclassified studies and analyses.

Herb, do we have some examples of these which will be available when you leave, some of our recent studies? We take a classified study and extract from it what we feel is necessary to protect our national interests. If it still is very meaningful to the public, we then publish it and make it available. We're responding to your inquiries more. Herb Hetu is our public affairs officer. And while he doesn't always give an answer -- he sometimes has to say "no comment" -- he isn't stuck in that "no comment" groove any more.

We're speaking more in public, as I am with you today.

-6-

We're participating more in conferences and symposia. Over all, I can assure you that I know that our intelligence community is doing an honorable and a vital job for our country. And I personally want you and the American public to know as much about it as you possibly can.

Clearly, as you would appreciate, some of the visibility we have is unwanted, because I believe it benefits no American. Here I'm talking of course primarily about unauthorized disclosures of properly classified information. And here, of course, we come to the nexus between intelligence and the media, because our need for some level of secrecy appears to run contradictory to your imperative of keeping the American public as well informed as it's possible. And it is a contradiction of purposes, of course. And yet we do have a lot of common ground between us.

Why have I described our need for secrecy? Well, one of the needs is to protect our sources. And I hardly need to stand here next to Bill Farr and try to elaborate -- [laughter] -- elaborate on a commonality that we have on this issue of protecting our sources. We also, of course, need to protect some information that does not reveal our sources, information which is of benefit to our policy-makers because they have it and nobody else does, or because they have it and the other people don't know that we have it. But here, again, we have much in common with you because what is that? That's nothing but an exclusive that we're going to hang onto as long as we can.

So each of us, I believe, in our different purposes for our country has a lot in common. And we can understand each other's motives and purposes. And as a result, as I've said to you, we are trying to understand your imperative of keeping the public informed, and I'm trying to keep you more informed and be more responsive within the necessary limits of protecting our sources and protecting that information which is of exclusive value to our policy-makers.

On your side, I would not ask you to be less persevering or to cover up and ignore our faults. But I would question whether some elements of the media aren't overly eager to resurrect old, well-formed stories about the CIA and print them as if they were today's news. I would also wonder whether some elements of the media apply the same standards of proof and confirmation to stories that come from leaks as they do to other stories. And it's been my experience that a large percentage of the leakers have motives which are not altruistic.

Finally, I would say there are times when I believe the press should recognize it may not be in the public interest



-7-

to publish valid security information which you may receive; the names of our agents, for instance. And yet I also would not accept the excuse that you must publish it because if you don't, Joe or Bill or Mary will; or that if you have the information, it's certain that the KGB will have it also, and you might as well put it out. I think those are not valid reasons.

All in all, of course, you face very difficult judgments in these issues, and we face them too in terms of what we can release to you, in the courts and in other ways. We each view the problems differently, but I say again we have much in common. And I would also say that I believe this period of greater visibility that we have gone through and are in is basically a net plus for the intelligence community of our country. It's a plus because we must regain the full confidence and support of the American public, and because we must not permit abuses in the future. There are those, the minuses, the inhibitions on the actions that we can take. The risks that we will take under these circumstances are less perhaps than before.

The important issue before our country today is how much assurance does the nation want and need against invasions of the privacy of our citizens and against the taking of foreign policy actions which are considered unethical. How do we balance these desires for privacy and propriety with the resulting reduction in our ability to collect intelligence or to carry out covert actions overseas?

Today, the Congress is, I hope, about to give expression to this question of that balance. It will do so in legislation, enacting charters for our intelligence community. Such legislation will set out, on the one hand, the authority for what we do and, on the other hand, the restrictions on how we can do it. My hope is that such legislation defining charters will be passed by this Congress. If it is written with care and sensitivity to the kinds of problems I've been discussing, it may help to resolve some of those difficulties. If there is overreaction and an attempt to tie our hands, or underreaction and an attempt to put no restraints upon us at all, it will not be good. The one will invite continuing abuses; the other will emasculate our necessary ability to garner information.

After these numerous comments of the pluses, minuses of where we are and where we're going, let me sum up by assuring you that, in my view, the intelligence components of our government are, today, strong and capable. The intelligence community is undergoing substantial change. That is never an easy or a placid process in a large bureaucracy. But out of the metamorphosis is emerging an intelligence community in



which the legal rights of our citizens and the constraints and the controls on intelligence activity are bound with the continuing need to be able to collect the information necessary for the conduct of our foreign policy. This is not an easy period of transition, and we are not there yet. But we are moving rapidly and surely in the right direction. When we reach our goal, we will have constructed a new model of intelligence, a uniquely American model, reflecting the laws, the ethics of our country. As we proceed, we do need your support and your understanding. And that's why I'm grateful that you would come out this early in the morning to let me be with you.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

MAN: ...field some questions. I'd like to have the questioner identify himself, and I'll try to repeat the questions so that....

Q: [Inaudible.]

DIRECTOR TURNER: ...it seems to me has led to so much more disclosure by irresponsible people, people writing books and disclosing information. And it's been very injurious to the country overall.

Q: The failure to conclude the prosecution was because of violations of the man's civil rights. Do you regret that?

DIRECTOR TURNER: I very much regret that the man's civil rights were violated, and therefore we couldn't proceed with a legal case. Absolutely. And I certainly don't believe in invading people's civil rights.

MAN: The question was by Mrs. Auch (?) of Associated press.

Q: [Inaudible.]

MAN: I'm not sure that I can rephrase that. Did most of you hear that, I hope? The questioner is asking whether the ultimate in retrieval of mass information by intelligence ability is being accomplished....

DIRECTOR TURNER: That's a very stimulating thought to disseminate our intelligence information on capital ray tubes (?), in effect, with computer storage, so there won't be hard copy around which can be Xeroxed and given to the media.

-9-

We're not going to be there, as the reports indicated, by 1981. We're not moving nearly as rapidly as I would like. But I have been encouraging and trying to find the money to put into that kind of research. And I think it will -- the day will come when, say, in the Washington environment, I will put together the morning intelligence report for the President, and he will press a button on his desk when he wants it. It will appear on a capital ray tube at whatever rate of speed reading that he can handle, the graphics beside it. But he'll have a button on his machine that says "P" for President. There'll be another one for "D" for Defense, for Secretary Brown. He may not get the same information as the President. Do you see what I mean? I may share something with the President -- I could make one up here now -- that I wouldn't share with [the Secretary of Defense].

[Words inaudible.] And in that way we can really control the dissemination and not have so many copies going around.

Unfortunately, we're unlikely to ever get where somebody doesn't have to have a written version of this. And Mr. Xerox has really done us in.

[Laughter.]

MAN: Any other questions?

Q: What is your rating of the cooperation between the press and the CIA? Average? Above average? Or excellent, or poor? If that is not classified information.

MAN: The question, Mr. Hetu, was how does he rate the present cooperation between the press and the CIA?

DIRECTOR TURNER: Well, basically, I think the type of cooperation that exists, that we encourage, is within the new limits. That is, we no longer have contractual relationships with the members of the American media. We are proscribed in that. So there isn't that same intimate relationship that existed a dozen years ago or so.

I think the basic relationship is good. I have listed for you in my talk three of my principal complaints, so to speak. I really do feel that it's a little unfair when we get a story in the press with the big headline "CIA Tests People With Drugs and Sent Three Mice to the Moon," or something like that, you know. But buried in the last paragraph is "It was done in 1952."

[End of Side 1.]

Q: What does the restructuring of CIA in our country

have effect upon its cooperation with the similar intelligence activities in other countries in the international scene?

DIRECTOR TURNER: How does our restructuring affect our cooperation with other intelligence activities, countries, services? I think it will help that, those relationships, but only if we can stanch the flow of unauthorized releases of classified information. Nobody, as an individual in a foreign country, intelligence service in a foreign country, wants to share innermost secrets about sources, about sensitive information with you if it's going to appear on the front page of the American press in a week or two.

So we have to be able to give better evidence that we can keep secrets that are shared with us.

Q: I'm Mo Schlemer (?), a retired newspaper and magazine publisher. What happened, or failed to happen, in Iran?

MAN: ...He asked what happened or failed to happen in Iran.

DIRECTOR TURNER: I wondered if we'd get to that.

[Laughter.]

Starting over a year ago, we in intelligence were reporting to our policy-makers that there were lots of problems in Iran. And some of them were disaffected people who weren't in on the political action. Others were disaffected because they didn't have an adequate share of economic growth. Others were unhappy because the Moslem religion was giving in to Western modernization. Others were just unhappy with the form of the government and the Shah as a person.

What we did was continually to report the rising tide of unhappiness. What we did not anticipate was that the series of individual, small volcanoes that were bubbling around would suddenly come together into a Mt. Vesuvius, as the result of the catalytic efforts of one 78 year old cleric who'd been out of the country for 14 years. And what we did not appreciate was that this bringing together of the pressures would be such that the Shah, with his extensive military and police forces, would not be able to step in at the right moment and handle it.

So, yes, we missed these predictions of what I believe is one of the few true revolutions that we've witnessed in many, many years. We did keep people aware that there were problems developing. We underestimated the ability of the cleric to bring this together. We overestimated the likelihood that a strong police power would be brought to bear and would keep these forces under control, at least to the last minute.

-11-

I think you'd have to say the Shah missed the same message. And I would say that I don't know many people in the media or academie or other intelligence services who did much better. But I don't want to try to exonerate ourselves. We would have liked to have done better. We'll try harder in the future. But at the same time, please don't judge the overall performance of the intelligence community on whether we predict immediate outbursts of coups, assassinations and overthrows of government and unexpected election returns. It would be nice if we could do it. But what helps our policy-makers is that we are keeping them alert for the longer-term trends where they can really do something that will be of influence and importance.

It's often too late when we come to the brink on whether the Shah's going to fall or stay in a particular circumstance to do something.

Q: You say your authority has been increased recently. What do you need that you haven't got to do the best possible job of gathering intelligence for our government?

DIRECTOR TURNER: What do we need to do the job that we haven't had?

One of the most important things that I would like is some enhanced legal authority to bring to prosecution people who deliberately release classified information. We have made some progress recently in having an Attorney General who was willing to take to court a man named Frank Snepp, who published a book, without giving it to us, as he had promised to do in his contract with us, purely for checking classified content, not for clearing the substance of the book. And the appeals court has recently upheld that case. And that's a step in the right direction.

But we need some tightening of the laws here to inhibit people from doing this.

Q: Well, can I extend that question one little bit?

MAN: Sure.

Q: What is the score comparatively where, let's say, I go rob a bank or I go release something that damages your operation? What is the punishment now?

DIRECTOR TURNER: If you work for the Department of Commerce and you release some statistical predictions on the wheat harvest, or something, in this country that people can then speculate on for their personal profit, you'll go to jail. If you release information to the media in this country, not to a foreign power, the Espionage Law just doesn't cover you. The only way -- well, we just can't get to people like that if they

-12-

disclose classified information. We need some tightening of that, at least some law that says if you disclose the names and identities of our intelligence personnel, like this traitor called Agee does all the time, that you can be prosecuted. Today we couldn't attack Agee for many of the things he does, even though they are very, very detrimental.

Q: Yes. I heard William Colby debate Dan Ellsberg at the USC seminar. And Colby's, William Colby's comment was that they should have the government legislature take more action to know what's going on, that they could help to balance it. Do you think that our government, I mean our Senate and Congress -- that that would be fair....?

DIRECTOR TURNER: Yes. And we are very pleased that we have two committees of the Congress today devoted entirely to oversight of the intelligence process. They are the kinds of people who are looking into just this sort of thing. On the one hand, they supervise us; they check on us; they can scold us. On the other hand, they positively try to help us. They try to find what we need in a legitimate way, and then they try to get that by congressional action.

MAN: ...One more question. Ms Steele?

Q: ...There has been lots of criticism that intelligence agencies have kept top secret much information that should not be kept secret from the American public. And I'm wondering if changes are taking place. Now, are you changing your criteria on what is and what is not classified, and what is and what is not available to the United States' people?

DIRECTOR TURNER: Yes. Are we changing our criteria on what can and should be classified originally or kept classified? And very definitely, the President in recent months has issued a new executive order on classification and declassification. And the standards for classifying something have been made more specific and they've been tightened. The authorities to classify have been limited. And a very specific notation must be made on each classification as to whether there is justification not to automatically declassify it after certain periods of time. Different levels have different automatic downgrading or declassifying dates.

So there is real, positive action in the direction you were suggesting. Beyond that, as I've said to you, we have published much more in the last several years simply by addressing this question head-on and not letting one paragraph of classified information in a 50 page report defer us from releasing the 49 3/4 pages that we could.

We really are trying hard. And you know, I don't want

-13-

to sound as though I'm just doing this for you. I'm doing it for me too, trying to declassify as much as we can, because my interest is in protecting secrets. The fewer secrets I have to protect, the better they're going to be kept. And so by releasing information that appears to be classified and need not be, I then concentrate our efforts on that which really must remain classified. And truly, one of the reasons there are so many leaks today is that we have lost respect within the government for the classified label, because so much has become classified that need not be kept there.

So we're trying. We do have a lot in common with you. Again, thank you very much for your....

[Applause. End of tape.]

